

The Persistent Voice

Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, IA

Spring 2009 Issue

Spring 2009 has been our final print version of *The Persistent Voice*. We have been located on the Wartburg Seminary website for several years now. You found us by scrolling under "Resources." Or perhaps you found us by googling "Persistent Voice." Bookmark us as a favorite so you can find us easily again. On this website one can find back issues at the end of the articles. We will continue to post at least quarterly and when news and voices prompt us to post. So, look there often. And continue to contribute news, features, poetry and book reviews by sending them to: ncookeverist@wartburgseminary.edu. We will also continue to sponsor "Persistent Voice Events" on campus, such as the upcoming visit of Postville pastor Steve Brackett, who will help us focus on issues of justice. We plan to publish a news story after his visit.

Signs of the Times

Today: Women Still Wait

by Andrea Myers

My husband Ronald and I met and married at Wartburg Seminary. We knew that life as a clergy couple would have its challenges. We were prepared to juggle two demanding schedules and to navigate delicate matters like where our future children would attend Sunday School. As the February 2007 assignment process approached, we sought the advice of bishops and regional coordinators. Each of them spoke about the difficulties of placing couples and offered possible strategies, while warning that one of us might wait 6-12 months for a call after the other found a congregation. We tried our best to remain calm, but such conversations tested our capacity to "trust the process."

The four other women and men assigned with us to our synod were all ordained before summer's end. Meanwhile, Ronald and I struggled with the lack of first-call opportunities within commuting distance of one another. With both of us interviewing, Ronald was the first to receive a call and was ordained in December 2007.

Two years after graduating, I am still awaiting call. I have tried to make the best of things, but the wait continues to be a painful wilderness. I have joyfully celebrated the ordinations of my

classmates, seminary friends, and my own husband while not daring to do any planning for my own. Each delay and disappointment is crushing, at times causing me to question my calling which, prior to graduation, was continually affirmed. I can't help but believe that if I were not part of a clergy couple, I would have received a call long ago. For the moment, I live vicariously through my husband's ministry (even though "vicariously" doing ministry isn't the goal) and supply preach wherever possible, all the while longing for a call of my own.

Our synod staff tells us that our situation has taught them some valuable lessons about placing first-call clergy couples, including the need to place the female candidate first. It's not clear how such a strategy might have changed our experience. While I know that some congregations have declined to consider a female candidate, the more visible issues in my case have been a lack of nearby openings, my "first call" status, and our inability to live in two parsonages at once. To the extent that gender enters the process, it only exacerbates the clergy-couple issues hindering a candidate like me from serving the church I love.

PERSISTENT VOICE EVENT

Thursday, May 7, 7pm

Fritschel Auditorium, WTS Campus

Rev. Steve Brackett, Pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Postville, IA and WTS grad ('05) will lead a public forum on the current situation in his community, one year after the largest and most devastating immigration raids in U.S. history.

Time to Move to the Web Completely

By Norma Cook Everist

This is our 20th year of publication! It began with a knock at my seminary office door and the voice of one woman, Rhonda Hanisch, who was waiting for a call to ordained ministry. In that fall of 1989 she said, "We need a networking newsletter to keep connected – the women are waiting much longer for calls than men." She said it should have the word "Voice" in it. The next day she came back again and added: "Persistent." So, I said, "Let's do it."

If Rhonda named what was to be born, Juel Piec financed the birthing costs. That same fall she was worship leader at the annual Women of the ELCA Bible Study education event held on campus. Just shortly after Rhonda's

visit, Juel said to me, "I would like to donate my honorarium to something to help women." I said, "Thank you. I have just the thing...." Rebecca Ellenson, who was then my student assistant, collaborated with me on the design: what columns we should have and our editorial policies. Those column titles, the goldenrod color, and our commitment that people's own voices would be heard without distortion - these have remained the same. Twenty years later, we have asked these three women to comment on where we are today. Their words and a few others follow below.

How long would we publish? "As long as necessary" we answered. So, each fall we give an open invitation to students to gather and we ask the question, "Is *The Persistent Voice* still necessary?" And each year, there is a resounding "Yes!" We had no idea we would publish so long...nor that Juel's gift would go so far. Her seed money blossomed into donations from readers who have continuously sustained us, sometimes from surprising places: bishops' offices, churchwide units, women's groups, graduates to be sure, but also from people about whom we don't know. But they have come to know *us*.

From the very beginning men have been part of this mission. The first poem we published was written by a man in Feminist Theology class, Ray Blank. We post that again below along with the poems of two other men, current student Scott Piper and graduate Peter Heidi.

Today, our student staff is three men and three women, full of ideas for stories, now and well into the future. But, we discerned that sustaining a print piece was no longer viable. Many newsletters have moved completely to the web.

The collection of issues over 20 years is an extensive chronicle of events in history as we have moved toward the full inclusion of women in the ministry of the church and full partnership of women and men. A copy of this collection is available on loan to anyone who would like to do research or simply would enjoy reading it. Contact me at ncookeverist@wartburgseminary.edu .

How many students have served on the staff of *The Persistent Voice* over the past 20 years? We counted 154; their names are printed below. Many, many more students contributed poetry, book reviews and articles for PV. Many, having gained writing and editing experience, have gone on to publish other things throughout the church. They have come to Wartburg, served, and gone on to all kinds of ministry in the church and world. Meanwhile my role here has remained constant through these years. I continue to teach Educational Ministry and Church Administration and Mission at Wartburg and also will be serving the broader church and world through lecturing, workshops, and writing. Who knows, I just may come and visit you. Give me a call, or email, and visit my blog: normacookeverist.blogspot.com.

A word from Rev. Rhonda Hanisch, Wartburg Seminary, 1989:

It's been twenty years since the voice became persistent. The parable from Luke 18 inspired me then and continues to do so today. Twenty years ago I was still awaiting my first call. I had eleven months between graduation and ordination. I had been drafted to the South Dakota Synod along with twelve men. They all had calls before summer's end. In 1990 there were 24 women pastors serving congregations in SD. Now there are 54, and of that number 3 are senior pastors. The number of women in a senior pastor position in the

ELCA remains proportionately small. So, while some things change, others just shift.

I began my ministry as a solo pastor in Badger, SD at Badger Lutheran Church and served there for six years. I then became an associate pastor in Brookings, SD at Ascension Lutheran Church and served for eleven years in that position. After the senior pastor took a call to churchwide in 2007, I was called to be the senior pastor at Ascension. I was a little wary at first, but God calmed my heart and things are going well. My associate is a young Native American pastor, Rev. Herb Wounded Head III. This is Pastor Herb's second call, after serving as a solo pastor for three years.

Is *The Persistent Voice* still needed? Yes. We have a long way to go yet. As an example, I share this story: I have attended the Head of Staff Seminar put on by the ELCA the past two years. It has been helpful in many ways. During this year's session, a senior pastor from New York asked about my current call and about my associate. He then wanted to know if my associate has any problems working with a female senior pastor. The answer is "no." Nevertheless, my first thought was that no one had asked the former senior pastor—a male—if I, as the associate, had any problems working with him. The senior pastor from NY presents a sign that *The Persistent Voice* needs to continue.

I continue to be proud of *The Persistent Voice* and commend Dr. Norma Cook Everist and each year's staff for their outstanding work. May God continue to bless you all and your voices!

A word from Rev. Juel Pierce, Wartburg Seminary, 1986:

Dear Persistent Voice,

Although I am sad to hear that you will not be publishing a paper issue anymore (some of us still really like print pieces), I am confident that *The Persistent Voice* will continue--because it is the voice of God's Spirit!

I am so thankful that, in a small way, I could be part of *The Persistent Voice*. Twenty years ago I was a parish pastor in a small rural parish; for the last 18+ years I have been a hospital chaplain in St. Joseph, MO. I also recently retired after nearly 16 years as chair of the Central States Synod Candidacy Committee. I remember when I began my ministry as a parish pastor, a LCMS pastor from a nearby parish told me, "I don't think women can be pastors." My reply to him was, "Just watch me!" Although there are still a few who don't believe we can be pastors, many others have been watching, hearing, and experiencing our ministry. And because the persistent voice calling us to ministry is God's voice, we will continue to grow in numbers, power, and authority. Christ is calling us.

Thanks be to God for all of us, and those whom God will call in generations to come.

A word from Rebecca Ellenson, Wartburg Seminary, 1990:

Twenty years ago I was anticipating graduation and hoping for a good call when I took on the role of student editor for this new newsletter. I can hardly believe it was that long ago!

Rev. April Larson, another WTS grad who went on to become the first ELCA woman bishop, was then the assistant to the bishop of the Southeast Minnesota synod at the time and knew me from my internship. I was assigned to that synod and she was instrumental in advocating for my call to a wonderful rural parish.

After 4 1/2 years there I accepted a call to a very large congregation in Duluth, MN. I served there for 6 1/2 years as the associate pastor. The congregation experienced many changes and transitions during that time, including the election of the senior pastor to bishop, and the sudden death of the next senior pastor while he was on sabbatical. I experienced a number of significant personal changes and transitions myself and decided to leave parish ministry.

In February of 2001 I began working in the non-profit sector of Duluth, first as an affordable housing project developer, then as a grant-writer and strategic planning consultant, and for the last 5 years as the Executive Director of SOAR Career Solutions where we help people with employment barriers to get jobs. I remember after leaving parish ministry and working my first 40-hour week. I felt as if I was on vacation!

At SOAR we help people identify their dreams, believe in their future again, and set and achieve their goals. We serve over 350 people a year who have struggled to find and keep sustainable jobs. They may have a chemical addiction, or a lack of education, or a mental health issue, or a criminal history. Over 90% of our clients have very little or no income at all when they come to us. About three years ago we started a collaborative project with other agencies and non-profits in Duluth to help one of the most neglected and growing population groups in our country: ex-offenders returning to their communities after incarceration. We provide the transitional supports and case management they need to make a positive re-entry and avoid re-offending.

My work is completely secular now, but in many ways I feel that I have come full circle. What all of our clients need most is hope and a set of people who believe in them so that they can recognize their potential. Isn't that really what we all need? I was drawn to ministry through a commitment to social justice and the pull of the gospel to make a difference in the world, to lift up the lowly. I used to preach about serving the poor, now I serve the poor, empowering them to realize their dreams.

*A word from **Rev. April Ulling Larson**, Wartburg Seminary, 1978, the first woman to be elected bishop in the ELCA, a consistent supporter of *The Persistent Voice*, along with her husband, Rev. Judd Larson (WTS, 1978). In a phone interview she said:*

"These twenty years of *The Persistent Voice* have provided quite a legacy. This networking newsletter has bound us together, men and women who have a passionate concern for issues of justice. It tied us together, way beyond common ties of Wartburg classmates. It was a work of the Spirit because we have not had other publications quite like this.

"It is not simply a coincidence that the first woman to be president of one of our ELCA seminaries, the first woman to head ELCA Global Mission, the first two ELCA woman bishops and the first tenured woman professor at an ALC seminary are all Wartburg women. Wartburg, and *The Persistent Voice*, have provided and continue to provide a place that encourages women in leadership. Through this networking newsletter, even if we don't know each other personally, we support each other. I have never thrown away an issue of *The Persistent Voice*. They are precious."

April now serves as senior pastor of First Lutheran Church in Duluth, Minnesota. She says, "My work is stimulating. I like to go at things full speed in many different dimensions." She served as bishop for 16 years. At the time she completed her service, only two bishops had been serving longer. She said, "I've been privileged to have such a broad range of ministry experiences, a trained Search Bible study leader, pastor with Judd in small rural congregations, assistant to the bishop, the 2nd woman bishop in the world, serving continuously on the Agenda and Executive Committees of the ELCA Conference of Bishops, and extensive ecumenical and global experiences as bishop."

Through it all, and in her present position, April serves with grace, authenticity and wisdom.

A word from Tanya Wittwer, Wartburg Seminary, 2003, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia:

(Over the years *The Persistent Voice* has published stories of the ongoing quest for women's ordination in the Lutheran Church in Australia; here an update)

Twenty years ago we thought it would be only five to seven years until women would be ordained in the Lutheran Church in Australia (LCA). We are still waiting. Many of those for whom this is an important issue have left the LCA for other, more inclusive, denominations. Many young people have simply left the church, finding the attitude towards women and gays at odds with their own expression of Christianity. Those of us for whom this issue is important that remain often do so because we belong to a congregation that is supportive of women's ministries, or even of one that allows room for the (limited) exploration of vocation. We are tired, but have confidence in God's grace even if not in God's church.

A word from Rev. Laurel Halvorsen Bernard, Wartburg Seminary, 1994, one of our early staff members:

In a phone interview, Laurel said that she, together with husband, Rev. Tim Bernard have served many years in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Laurel relates that their family and the congregations have faced enormous challenges. "You can either use the resources you have or just sink," she said. "Sometime we just floated."

"Challenges in the family, the congregation and the communities could have been demoralizing, but we have supported one another. I have faced a serious medical issue including extensive surgery. Our oldest son has

intractable epilepsy. Preparing his ketogenic diet requires constant vigilance. Tim and I started out sharing a call but now Tim serves full time at Messiah Lutheran in Marquette and I serve half time at Bethany in Nagaunee.

“Before I came this congregation had faced challenging issues; my long-time service here has been helpful to them. I asked for a pay reduction which served them well. Over the years they have often provided meals when my responsibilities as a mother were essential. Their care has been constant and my consistent pastoral ministry has likewise nurtured them. Ten years ago they didn’t think they would survive. They have not only survived but have started to see some growth.”

A word from Rev. Christine Iverson, Wartburg Seminary, 1984, a long-time contributor to The Persistent Voice:

Thank you so much for including me! In getting ready to begin my new ministry, I have been going through things in my office and getting organized. Just yesterday, I found copies of the newsletter from 1996 that included a piece I wrote about the witness of my mother. It was good to read and be reconnected to her and to the community of *The Persistent Voice*.

So much has happened since I left Wartburg it doesn’t seem possible, but the passage of time cannot be denied. The son I gave birth to between junior and middle years is now ordained and serving his own churches. Twenty years ago, I was serving four churches in west central Kansas with my husband (one of four being an LC-MS congregation). What had started out as a two-point call became four as the oil bust and rural crisis continued to hit hard. That part of small town/rural ministry has continued to get worse as more and more congregations can no longer afford full-time pastors.

Rural ministry has long been a place women were called to because churches felt they were “down to a woman.” Instead, I have learned that I love rural ministry as a place that allows me to be a generalist, being creative in many fields while having the time to get to know and care for people. I am beginning a new call in Minnesota this month.

Some things have changed for the better. There are so many more women in ministry – it’s wonderful to have so much company. I think there is less of a tendency to think of women as needing to speak with one voice in order to be heard. It’s also wonderful to hear men coming out of seminary to preach and act inclusively as their norm. Twenty years ago, I had to drive miles and even hours to meet with other clergy women. The only positive upside of that was that we seemed to value that time and set it aside more readily as precious and necessary.

Some things have not changed. I have been interviewing for more than two years and had more than one interview where I was told before the interview that the congregation did not want a woman as lead pastor but would I please interview anyway. It is discouraging to have this still happening after nearly 40 years of the ordination of women. We are not past needing a way to enlarge our voices and hold people accountable in issues of gender and justice. It isn’t fixed yet – and we grow quiet at our own peril. Alone, it passes unnoticed. Together, our voices have power.

Thank you for all your years of support, encouragement, and mentoring.

You are a large part of the grace that has made this all possible!

In the Ordination of Women 39th Anniversary Year

Collected by Janice Hawley, MDiv. Middler

I was the first woman to preach in my home church's pulpit in 1988. I was 17. This was important to me as this was the gathering of particular saints who had named and shaped my baptismal gifts from baptism, through Sunday School and Affirmation of Baptism, and then gathered again to celebrate my Ordination in 1997. Since then other women and men have been encouraged to consider ordained and lay rostered ministry, and female clergy have been called to serve along with male clergy with those saints.

Amy Current, WTS alum 1997, Wartburg Financial Aid Director; Home church: Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Fargo, ND

The young woman pastor announced to the children during their time in worship that she would be leaving and that Pastor Jones would be coming and he would be there next Sunday. As the children returned to their seats, one little boy told his mother in a loud stage whisper that sounded disbelieving: we're getting a new minister and it's going to be a MAN!! The boy had known no other pastor than a woman.

Karen Lull, WTS ILL and Library Secretary

We have now witnessed an anticipated shift in how women and philanthropy may influence the whole of charitable giving in these present and coming years. It was three years ago that for the first time in US history women held the majority of assets and wealth in this country. Partly due to longevity of life and inheritance, women now hold 52% of the wealth and men 48%. This is a significant statistic. Studies show different giving patterns between genders and among generations. This highly impacts who will receive resources in charitable ways. We also know that the dollars usually follow where people have volunteered or spent much of their life in support and passion. Women of faith will impact this trend today and into the future.

Beth Nelson Chase, CFRE, WTS Vice President for Mission Support

Surprised By Neighborly Love

By Brad Dokken, MDiv. Junior

For some time the ELCA has been seriously studying issues of sexuality. A Social Statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" will be considered for adoption at the ELCA churchwide assembly in Minneapolis, MN, in August.

Although this statement deals with the full range of sexuality, many assume it addresses just one aspect – homosexuality. Even more specifically, many believe the statement focuses only on whether or not individuals in same-sex relationships can be ordained as pastors in the ELCA. The Social Statement contains so much more. At the heart of this document is the call to love our neighbor, to put aside what we consider right or wrong and see each other as God sees us, to love other as God loves us.

I believe this issue is one that becomes much more complex when you personally know someone who is being left out, who is being pushed to the side because their beliefs don't match up with others. When you walk that walk with someone, I believe you see it differently, and the rules are put aside.

In my home synod a congregation received a young pastor, fresh from seminary and they were excited to have him in their midst. He was excited to be there, to serve God's people to the best of his ability. During his time there, this young pastor realized that he was gay, and he found that he had the desire to be in a relationship. He struggled with what to do; should he inform the congregation, risking his call or should he keep his feelings silent, but being unhappy? After much discernment, he chose to tell his congregation.

What do you think happened?

One might guess that his congregation was outraged and insisted that he leave immediately. After all, this was a mostly conservative synod and a conservative area. Surely they would want nothing to do with this pastor.

The exact opposite happened. The church embraced him, because they had come to love him for who he was – a child of God. His sexual orientation was of little concern to them, and they wanted him to remain as their pastor. The church was willing to petition the bishop and the synod if necessary in order to keep their pastor who had become one of them. An outpouring of love and compassion for their brother, rather than making life difficult for him for being true to who he is.

What would happen if we embraced all those we encounter first and foremost as children of God, setting aside other labels that we would place upon them or upon us? What if we decided to stand beside each other, despite our differences or how we interpret rules, and cared for each with no limitations?

What a glorious day that would be!

Global Scene

"Breadwinners" and the Death of Identity

By Rob Corum, MDiv Junior

In Papua New Guinea , the society of the Iahita people was male dominated until the early 1980s, when “masculinity,” as defined by the indigenous religion and culture, suffered a dramatic collapse. (To read more about this, see *The Cassowary’s Revenge* by Donald Tuzin, University of Chicago Press, 1997.) At the same time arranged marriages were decreasing, creating fear in young men trying to find and “win” brides. Women were also becoming increasingly independent, banding together to take care of each other, and rely less on men to protect and provide. Both of these phenomena created a fear among the men that women would cease to need husbands. Since their whole identity was tied to this masculine role, many men began to see themselves as useless.

Ironically, in the pursuit of any kind of equity, including gender equity, balance is a challenge. There were clearly many injustices undone by the dramatic changes in the Iahita society. But just as clearly, that society cannot survive if the genders do not help each other. Even if the women, by working together, can grow enough yams to survive without men, it is better for the women, not to mention the men, if both genders have a role in their mutual survival.

I was in Mexico for January term and listened to poor people talking about what they have to do to survive. Two themes stuck with me from that trip. First, in relationships, interdependence equals harmony. Second, survival (in fact justice, as we strive for the well-being of all) depends upon cooperation, not competition.

In our own society today, “breadwinners” of every sort are facing growing anxiety, as some lose their jobs and others fear losing them. Truly it is not just a commandment, but a means of living in the abundant life God intends for us, when Jesus says: “Love one another.” By living *for* each other, we participate in the Kingdom of God , while we anticipate its ultimate fulfillment.

But job loss can also mean a loss of identity and a loss of meaning for our lives. This is a very important time to be the church, to speak the good news that our identity and meaning do not come from what we do or how well we are able to provide for others, but solely from what God has created and redeemed us to be in Christ. God has created us for relationship in harmony, both with the Triune God and with each other. And as things change, cherished images of who we are can be destroyed, bringing about a kind of “death.” But thanks be to God, who has shown us our resurrection in Christ’s resurrection. Losing an identity that depends upon our strengths can be freeing when we learn to rely on God’s strength instead.

Women’s World Day of Prayer in Lae, Papua New Guinea

By Else Schardt, Wartburg Seminary Adjunct Professor; written from Papua New Guinea

In 170 countries all over the world, women celebrated the women of Papua New Guinea and prayed for them, using the special order of service these women had written many months ago for the occasion.

For many weeks women here have been excited about the great event, and in towns and villages, from the seashores and up through the rugged mountains,

their preparations have included composing and practicing special hymns in many languages, practicing dances and skits, sewing bright matching dresses to wear for the occasion (women from each village chose the colors and fabrics for their particular “uniform” for the day), weaving *bilums* (traditional bags) and threading bead necklaces to give to visiting guests and speakers, and carefully assigning the different parts of the service to a variety of women and men.

I had a wonderful foretaste of the excitement and fervor when I was invited to join a group of women—two German women and seven PNG women—on a small boat for a special day of festivities in three large villages along the seashore southeast of Lae. Hymns, traditional dances, and special services with prayers accompanied each welcome for us, and these were followed by snacks of delicious fruit as well as marvelously refreshing coconut water straight out of the young coconut, making perfect cups for drinking!

We gathered on a grassy field at Eriku, where stately old rain trees ringed the field, providing shade for many of the thousands of women and men and children who had come for this event. As they gathered, they became a mighty moving patchwork quilt of gorgeous colors in their beautiful floral dresses, blouses, and skirts, with brightly hued umbrellas hovering over them to shield them from the sun. A large slightly threadbare tent stood on the field where we happily found a shady spot to sit just within its perimeter.

A home-constructed stage, built by our friend, Wanya, and others, gorgeously decorated with branches and flowers, faced the crowds; dignitaries sat upon it, while other leaders sat in chairs in a thatch-shaded section alongside the stage. At various times during this very, very long service, speakers and musicians and those offering prayers stepped up onto the stage to do their presentations.

The Master of Ceremonies was a man, and several main speakers were also men, including the acting Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, Pastor Zau Rapa, and the Governor of this Morobe Province, Luther Wenge, brother to Pastor Giegere Wenge, the Martin Luther Seminary Principal, and others. Hundreds of men also attended the celebration, and city schools and many offices were closed out of respect and support for the women on this, their very special day.

The order of service was written and conducted in Tok Pisin, the *lingua franca* of the country, although PNG’s official language is English. Amazingly, this country of about 5 million persons has more than eight hundred different languages, making communication and the spread of the Gospel especially challenging; Tok Pisin has become a very unifying language for this unbelievably large diversity of tribes and cultures and languages.

Various language groups sang hymns, some used action songs, and hundreds of women had already marched and danced and sung their way throughout town, beginning at the main market and walking up through the main streets and then down toward Eriku. The main, most dynamic speaker for the service was Ms. Dawa Kari, who works in the Evangelism Department of the Lutheran Church here.

The service lasted more than five hours and was followed by more speeches and skits. The allotted prayer time during the service consisted of nineteen different prayers offered by women and men of all different denominations, languages, and areas. Some of the prayers were very long and were shouted with much fervor and much repetition and begging to God, accompanied by

whispered prayers and affirmations in the congregation, too. It reminded one of a revival service. We realized though, that the passionate prayers, revealing tremendous suffering by women here and throughout the world, perhaps more closely resembled the impassioned pleas and despair of the Psalmists and other leaders as described in the Bible. After every five prayers or so led by women, a man—usually a pastor—would rise and offer a prayer of repentance on behalf of the men. The service also highlighted the indescribable beauty and richness of this land and affirmed the great need for all its inhabitants to honor this paradise on earth by taking good care of it.

Amazingly, the thousands of attendees sat very patiently through it all, without porta-potties or drink or food, and, mercifully, the cloudy day prevented the sun from beating down too severely. Every now and then a breeze whispered through the crowds, giving us a brief and welcome reprieve. Mothers nursed their infants at the breast, while toddlers scurried about quietly amid their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers.

Among the thousands of people dotting the field, we noted only five white persons—Ron and I and three others. We thank God daily that these wonderful people carry on the work of the Gospel so capably through thick and thin, how faithfully and fervently they carry on the Good News of God's love to the most remote parts of this magnificent land, lush with forests and food and flowers and minerals, yet crying from economic woes, crime, abuse, HIV-AIDS, and corruption. We remind our readers of our partnership with our sisters of PNG through the Body of Christ: may it include our daily thanks for their witness as well as our daily intercessions for them.

The Dance of Discernment

By Wendy Kalan, MDiv. Middler

Six years ago, Allison deForest drove to Iowa from Massachusetts to check out Wartburg Theological Seminary with her husband Chris and their daughters Dorrie and Mallory. They were discerning Chris's call to ordained ministry. While driving home, Allison realized this was the right thing to do as a family – right for Chris, right for the girls – but what about her? Everyone in the car seemed to be called to this new place, except her. She was having to give up so much and leave behind a life and a world she knew and loved. With tears and uncertainty, she followed God's lead and supported this radical new direction.

Allison says, "It's been like a dance," in regards to the marriage and life she and Chris have shared. Early in their marriage, the couple lived in Florida while Allison was in the Navy, and then moved to Tennessee for Allison's job as an engineer. With her career underway, Chris worked as a freelance writer. The dance then dipped in Chris's direction, when he was offered a fantastic job in Massachusetts, an offer too good to pass by. Having a difficult time finding the right job in engineering in New England, Allison's focus then shifted to staying home with their daughters and becoming deeply involved with their church. Then, unexpectedly, she was diagnosed with breast cancer – at 37, with two young children. During that difficult time, she and Chris felt so much support from their home congregation, that she began to see so clearly that God was truly present. She remembers: "We knew what it meant to be the body of Christ." A few years later, with cancer in remission, came another unexpected surprise, this time more joyous but no

less life-changing. One morning over breakfast, Chris expressed he was "feeling limited" and "realized he was meant to do more." And so they danced to Dubuque and seminary life.

At Wartburg, Allison went for a few months more, still feeling "like there was nothing here for me," especially since the girls were now older and needed her time less. After experiences working with the Center for Theology and Land, and passing up a job as an engineer in Peosta, she began to feel called herself, to theological study. Chris adjusted his schedule to allow her to catch up with him, as she began the M.Div track. Throughout this time, even into internship, questions about their true calls continued. But what remained constant for Allison was a love for God's word and for scholarship; she was enthralled by Hebrew and Greek, and the interpretation of scripture.

So now, six years later, Allison and Chris are dancing again; graduating together with Masters of Divinity, and the sway of the dance leading them to St. Andrews University in Scotland, where Allison will work 3 years towards her doctorate, while Chris supports the family with freelance writing and home-making, keeping his heart and mind open for a new call in the global church. What have they learned from all this? Allison admits, "It's not about *the getting there*, but *the going* on the journey...it's not a game you finish." What a dance! And the beat goes on...

Review of Resources

Twenty Wartburg women graduates, many former *Persistent Voice* staff, wrote chapters in the book, *Ordinary Ministry: Extraordinary Challenge*, (Norma Cook Everist, ed., Abingdon, 2000) Written for women and men, the book through vivid stories, provides support and encouragement for parish ministry around the themes, "Trusting God," "Liberating Christians," "Living Vocation," and "Nurturing Community."

Web resources recommended by WTS students and faculty:

From Tim Koester, M.Div. Senior:

"Sarah Laughed" <http://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/women/> is an exploration of the weekly lectionary from progressive Episcopalian Sarah Dylan Breuer.

From Gloria Stubitsch, M.Div. Intern:

My favorite blog is The Kitchen Table <http://princetonprofs.blogspot.com/>. It's a conversation about race, gender, politics, and often theology.

From David Lull, Professor of NT at WTS: The website for the Women's

Institute for Social Transformation <http://www.grail-us.org/wist/> engages in popular education to train, support and collaborate with women working for social change locally and globally.

Recommended for summer reading:

This Child Will be Great: Memoir of Africa's First Woman President by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, president of Liberia (Harper Collins 2009).

Poetry

From the very beginning men have shared this mission. *The first poem published by The Persistent Voice was by Ray Blank, written for Feminist Theology class in 1989. We re-print his work, beside that of two other men, current student Scott Piper and graduate Peter Heide.*

FREEDOM

FREEDOM

Free to be,

All that you can be.

Unless that offends me.

All that I allow you be, Says ME.

OPPRESSION!

FREEDOM

Free to be,

All that you can be.

You challenge growth within me.

To reach to be able to see,

All that I can be.

Together WE

LIBERATION

Ray Blank, Wartburg Seminary, 1992

Their patient walk

Spices prepared,

mournful they walk

to the tomb,

themselves prepared

for their nurturing work.

Among empty linen cloths,

it is truth the women find,

truth they remember,

truth they carry

with them to proclaim.

Bewildered

they are reminded,

joyful they return.

Upon ears that do not hear

the sound of their words fall,

“He is not here, but has risen.”

The promise of promises fulfilled,

and forgotten.

By Scott Piper ,M.Div. Middler,Wartburg Theological Seminary,29 March 2009

Note: This poem is based on Luke 24:1-12. I put the action of each line at its end to emulate Christ's resurrection, and not his death, as being the culmination of his passion.

PENTECOST

Many voices, choices, Word,

From wooden throne, flesh and bone,

we heard forgiveness.

For all who live in crisis, Christ is

the one who speaks

to us, with us, in us.

So that our ending changes, rearranges

the way we feel and think, link

The way we live, we give our lives.

To the word that rises from the dust

For us—for us.

We try to stay, but stray, lost

We try to hide, guilt and pride,

what cost

Atonement

Broken, and unclean, we lean

on grace alone

In sin, we win, begin

To live in baptism's dress, progress,

Or pilgrimage, we go, know

Christ's righteousness, witness

To the world that knows the glove

Not love—not love

Child finds the stair,

beware, fright

And starts to crawl,

Adam's fall, God's right reunion

Through the one who teaches, reaches down to humans

With care, to share, and bear

Our unfaithfulness, disdain, Christ's pain

Excruciating, shame, came

Punishment by law, blameless, shameless

Redeeming us with great love

Made whole—made whole!

By Rev. Peter Heide, Leland, WI, WTS, 1996

Peter, who has been legally blind for the last few years, just had a cornea transplant. He serves two small rural congregations, St. John's and Zion .

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20th Annual Convocation on Inclusive and Expansive Language By
Sylvia Lee-Thompson, M.Div. Senior

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